

Nature Photography Definition



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It was announced in May 2014, that PSA, FIAP (Fédération Internationale de l'Art Photographique) and RPS (Royal Photographic Society) joined forces and developed a common definition for Nature Photography for use by all international exhibitions recognized or patronized by any or all of these organizations. The representatives for each organization were **Daniel Charbonnet, FPSA, EPSA (PSA)**, Pierluigi Rizzato, MFIAP, EFIAP/p (FIAP), and John R. Simpson, ARPS, MFIAP (RPS).

This common definition will go into effect January 1, 2015 and will apply to all Nature, Wildlife, and Nature Theme sections of exhibitions recognized by PSA and/or patronized by FIAP and RPS closing on or after that date. The intent of the new common definition is to reduce conflicts for the exhibitions, the exhibitors and the judges when a single exhibition has been recognized by multiple organizations and to provide some clarifications. The new definition is presented below in a bulleted format suggested by PSA Member **Jim Bodkin** so it can also serve as a checklist when selecting your images for competition.

I. Nature photography is restricted to the use of the photographic process to depict all branches of natural history, except anthropology and archaeology, in such a fashion that a well-informed person will be able to identify the subject material and certify its honest presentation.

- The story telling value of a photograph must be weighed more than the pictorial quality while maintaining high technical quality.
- Human elements shall not be present, except where those human elements are integral parts of the nature story such as nature subjects, like barn owls or storks, adapted to an environment modified by humans, or where those human elements are in situations depicting natural forces, like hurricanes or tidal waves.
- Scientific bands, scientific tags or radio collars on wild animals are permissible.
- Photographs of human created hybrid plants, cultivated plants, feral animals, domestic animals, or mounted specimens are ineligible, as is any form of manipulation that alters the truth of the photographic statement.
- No techniques that add, relocate, replace, or remove pictorial elements except by cropping are permitted.
- Techniques that enhance the presentation of the photograph without changing the nature story or the pictorial content, or without altering the content of the original scene, are permitted including HDR, focus stacking and dodging/burning.
- Techniques that remove elements added by the camera, such as dust spots, digital noise, and film scratches, are allowed.
- Stitched images are not permitted.
- **All allowed adjustments must appear natural.**
- Color images may be converted to greyscale monochrome.
- Infrared images, either direct-captures or

derivations, are not allowed.

II. Images used in Nature Photography competitions may be divided into two classes: Nature and Wildlife.

- Images entered in Nature sections meeting the Nature Photography Definition above can have landscapes, geologic formations, weather phenomena, and extant organisms as the primary subject matter.
 - This includes images taken with the subjects in controlled conditions, such as zoos, game farms, botanical gardens, aquariums and any enclosure where the subjects are totally dependent on man for food.
- Images entered in Wildlife sections meeting the Nature Photography Definition above are further defined as one or more extant zoological or botanical organisms free and unrestrained in a natural or adopted habitat.
 - Landscapes, geologic formations, photographs of zoo or game farm animals, or of any extant zoological or botanical species taken under controlled conditions are NOT eligible in Wildlife sections.
 - Wildlife is not limited to animals, birds and insects. Marine subjects and botanical subjects (including fungi and algae) taken in the wild are suitable wildlife subjects, as are carcasses of extant species.
 - Wildlife images may be entered in Nature sections of Exhibitions.

I would like to expand on some of the areas in the definition. These same areas were in the previous PSA, FIAP, and RPS definitions but have frequently been overlooked or misunderstood by exhibitors and judges.

- The definition does not allow replacing the background of your image, adding additional content from another image, or cloning out content from your original image. This restriction of cloning out content includes what you may think is inconsequential, such as a blade of grass in front of an animal's face. If you cannot crop it out, you must live with it if you intend to use the image in a Nature or Wildlife section of an exhibition.
- Both the old PSA and FIAP definitions and the new common definition prohibit human elements that are not an integral part of the nature story. Human elements are not limited to people or parts of people in the image. Human elements that can cause your images to be disqualified, or at best scored low, include but are not limited to:
 - Roads, paths, vehicle tracks, or trails
 - Fences and fence posts
 - Signs
 - Power Poles
 - Wires
 - Buildings (or parts of buildings)
 - Walls or parts of walls
 - Mowing and plowing patterns in fields

- Cut tree stumps, cut off limbs, branches or stems
- Jesses and thongs on legs of raptors and other birds (these are not scientific banding)
- ▶ The new definition does include some examples of human elements that are integral parts of the nature story. Other examples of allowable human elements include:
 - Birds nesting or feeding young on or in man-made objects.
 - Insects depositing eggs or egg sacs in man-made objects.
 - Animals eating fresh kills on fence posts, pilings, in roadways, etc.
 - A flood with raging water with a house or other human element floating in the flood.
 - A tornado ripping apart buildings or throwing around human elements.
 - The “natural force” examples show nature stories where these natural forces are out of control.
 - The keys are whether the judge considers the human element integral to the story and considers the nature story strong.

There is little difference between the current PSA Nature Definition and the new common definition. Most of the differences are more in the vein of clarification. In the few cases that the combined definition does make an existing subject no longer eligible (see examples below), acceptances of those subjects prior to January 1, 2015 will remain eligible for use in Nature Division Star Ratings applications. For those members working on Nature Galaxy and Photo Naturalist levels please try to get your titles completed before this date.
- ▶ Domestic animals are hidden in the “artificially produced hybrid plants and animals” clause in the current PSA definition. The new common definition specifically lists domestic animals, including those that have gone feral, as not being allowed.
 - Domestic animals are animals, such as horses, cats, dogs, poultry, cattle and sheep, that have been tamed and kept by humans as work animals, food sources, or pets, especially members of those species that have become notably different from their wild ancestors through selective breeding.
 - This particular restriction does eliminate just about all the “wild” horses in the world since those in the Americas, Europe and Western Asia are feral domestic horses, not true wild horses. The only true eligible horse is the rare Przewalski’s Horse also known as the Mongolian Wild Horse. Zebras, kiangs and onagers (wild asses) are also valid eligible members of the horse family.
 - It also reinforces the exclusion of any Llamas and Alpacas because those have always been domestic animals and have no ancestors that were never domesticated.
 - Cultivated plants are those that are grown specifically in decorative gardens and for food. Wildflowers planted in botanical gardens are allowed subjects in the same manner that wild animals in zoos are allowed subjects.
- ▶ The restrictions on, and allowances for, computer processing of your images remain but hopefully have been made a bit clearer.
 - Adding pictorial elements to your image or removing pictorial elements from your image remains in force. Please remember that cloning elements already in your image and making additional copies of those elements is the same as adding elements and is not allowed.
 - Adjustments that enhance your image without changing the content include exposure (globally and selectively), color balance, contrast, sharpening (globally and selectively), noise reduction, conversion to greyscale monochrome (with no color added), straightening, resizing, and cropping.
 - Deliberately blurring the background is not allowed.
 - Adding a vignette not originally produced by the camera is not allowed
 - HDR and focus stacking are still allowed. While several images are involved with each technique, you are not adding any pictorial elements. The content of each image in the stack is the same but with HDR the exposure for each image in the stack is different and with focus stacking the point of focus of each image in the stack is different.
 - Stitching is still not allowed. The content of each image is different. In this process the images are joined side by side with just enough content overlap to permit alignment and stitch the images together. Examples include stitched panoramas and stitched macro images. A panorama created by cropping a single image into panorama proportions is permitted.
 - The overriding requirement for any of the allowed adjustments is that the results must appear natural to the viewer. In this case, you are not the viewer; the judge is the viewer. You have an emotional attachment to your images so what looks natural to you may not look natural to someone else.

Try not to confuse pictorial quality with technical quality if you are asked to be a judge. The prime factors for pictorial quality are composition, quality of lighting and impact. Technical quality primarily covers exposure and sharpness. An over or under exposed image or an out of focus image is still a bad image no matter how strong the story. Two factors that straddle technical quality and pictorial quality are depth of field and partial cropping of subjects at the edges of the frame and admittedly these factors are judgment calls.

The common Nature Definition endeavors to level the playing field for nature photography and provide a standard for differentiation between a nature photograph and a pictorial image that happens to use a nature subject. It is important to follow the new Nature Definition if you want to compete in the many International Exhibitions and work towards Nature Star Ratings. The common Nature Photography Definition is required to be used by the Exhibitions after January 1, 2015 but clubs and competitions that use the PSA definition are encouraged to start using it at the beginning of the season to prevent needing to change mid-season. ■

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